

Change Management

Maintaining a Positive Attitude in a Changing Environment

Governmental Services Center

Serving the People Who Service the People



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People react to change. They rarely ignore it and most often they resist. When people see change being imposed upon them, suspicion and anxiety are common even when the changes are beneficial, logical, or inevitable. Most will not change something important until circumstances force them to make that change. Resistance is a healthy, useful function of living organizations, not just something to overcome.

It is important to understand that most people will transition through five predictable stages:

1. Shock (or Denial)
2. Flood of Emotion (usually anger)
3. Bargaining
4. Depression (grief)
5. Acceptance (intellectual/emotional)



To assist employees through the stages more smoothly, it can be helpful to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy of these feelings or actions. Whatever people feel is being taken away, in reality or perception, should be dealt with as if it were important. Making the feelings legitimate is important so they may deal with the emotional level of resistance which is lurking beneath the rational explanations.

According to Robert J. Lee, there are specific actions and responses that managers can select to maintain control and maximize positive outcomes:

1. Accept that people are the core part of almost every change process, not obstacles. Let them know you care. Listen to them. Include them.
2. Pay attention to resistances. When you sense it, get it out on the table. Treat it with respect.
3. Be flexible. You may decide that part of the change is an error or not necessary at this time. Adapt accordingly.
4. Understand organizational strengths. This is the apple cart problem: how to change some things without spoiling a lot of other things.
5. Overcommunicate. Set up better and new ways to communicate. Find people to talk to. Spell out the details. Be honest and quick in sharing what you know, acknowledging that there are some things you don't yet know.
6. Develop a clear vision of what will be. Translate the vision into action with implementation plans and timetables. Know where you fit in and let people know where they fit in.
7. Answer personal needs. Who's my boss? Who works for or with me? Where do I work? What's changing? Each person will want answers on a very personal level.
8. Create a method for mourning to the extent that there is real loss, so that it can be made part of an honored history. Let the transition stage of grief take its course so that acceptance is achieved.

For more information on managing change, please attend our workshop *Working Through Change* or *Managing Organizational Change* and see our [Course Catalog](#) for other course offerings.